

**‘Career and money aside, what’s the point of university?’ A  
comparison of students’ non-economic entry motives in three  
European countries**

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**Introduction**

Though many aspects of the student life-world are routine research topics, studies exploring students’ reasons for entering Higher Education (HE) appear fewer in number (Round, 2005:9; Kennett, Reed and Lam, 2011:65). This is somewhat surprising, because as Kaye and Bates (in press) argue, “examining the main reasons for students attending higher education [...] is one useful way of gaining insight into the decision-making of students in their considerations of attending university.” This article therefore aims to investigate motives for

university enrolment, and takes as its focus students' *non-economic reasons* - i.e. those unrelated to career aspirations and future earnings. This rationale is not based on a negative judgement of economic motives – as Budd (forthcoming) argues, degree study has arguably always been connected to employment and income goals. Some authors (e.g. Berrett, 2015, Winn, 2002) are admittedly more critical of what they see as a widespread shift towards such extrinsic motivations, but if this is the case, we might question if this is an unwanted development in a time of concerns about HEI's accountability and effectiveness (especially in view of low degree completion rates in many European countries – see Quinn, 2013). The idea here is simply to offer an indicative study of the importance students attach to *other* (perhaps less taken-for-granted) intrinsic and extrinsic entry motives; and - in an innovative attempt to examine how national context might influence decision-making - the study scrutinises students at universities in three different European countries: England, Germany and Portugal – three settings with different socio-economic backgrounds and HE financing systems. The following research questions underpin the enquiry:

1. How can university students' non-economic entry motives in the 3 countries be described?
2. What motivational patterns, if any, are evident within and across the 3 national settings?

Motivation is clearly an important concept in the field of educational research and indeed in HE. As Round argues, “a student's level of motivation will colour his or her attitude to the institution and the course, but it is also essential because it determines how much time they will put into their student activities. Motivation will thus directly affect academic success and proficiency, confidence and integration” (2005:28). Little wonder, then, that a great many scholars have concerned themselves with questions of how to define it; with conceptualising models which encapsulate how it functions; and with exploring the individual and contextual variables which may influence it. The sheer wealth and diversity of

such research presents something of a challenge in providing a concise overview. As such, the following will restrict itself to a more general examination of key conceptual understandings of motivation, before turning to an exploration of literature dealing more specifically with students' motivation in HE.

### **Defining motivation**

A number of expectancy and value theories are commonly discussed in the psychological literature on motivation. Seifert (2010) refers to 4 of these in relation to student motivation – self-efficacy theory (focussing on the relationship between self-belief and motivation); attribution theory (linking motivation to the factors to which we attribute our success and failures); self-worth theory (which suggests motivation is related to our attempts to maintain our sense of self-worth); and achievement goal theory (examining the ways in which goals drive behaviour – see Mäkinen et al, 2004, below). Though theorists disagree on the relative merits and demerits of the 4 theories, it seems likely that they will inter-connect in possibly quite complex ways to account for differences in motivation.

From the specific point-of-view of student motivation, Round (2005) considers a tri-partite classification, defining the concept in time orientations - motivation for initial entry into HE, daily motivation (with regard to attendance and engagement in tasks) and future motivation (career, salary, prestige, etc.). Round suggests that entry and future motivation may be strongly related, though only weakly to daily motivation. This classification is useful to this paper, where the interest lies primarily in examining the first component, and as Kennett, Reed and Lam (2011:65) point out, “surprisingly, there has been limited research directly asking students why they come to institutions of higher learning in the first place”.

In a UK survey which did include an examination of this area, Watkins (2008) identified 4 entry orientations which were not mutually exclusive. Students driven primarily by subject

interest were labelled ‘academics’ while those with strong and specific career goals were termed ‘next steppers.’ ‘Option openers’ had less defined employment aspirations, and the fourth group, ‘toe dippers,’ were mainly drawn by the perceived lifestyle university would offer. Mäkinen et al (2004:174-177) offer a similar model based on goal theory referred to earlier. Focussing again on the differing beliefs which students may attach to the purpose of university studies, they also suggest four orientations. Firstly, the label ‘theory-oriented’ is applied to those students motivated primarily by a desire to tackle theoretical problems and to exercise their autonomy as independent learners. A second group is described as ‘profession-oriented’ – these learners share a similar orientation to the first group, but are strongly driven by the quest for a career beyond university. The term ‘curriculum-oriented’ is used for the third group who differ from the previous two in that they tend to be surface learners motivated largely by instrumental desires for grades and certification. The final group are described as ‘practice-oriented’ learners – students who seek to identify ways in which their studies can contribute to their personal development.

The same authors discuss an additional motivational typology, classifying students as either study-oriented (motivated by course interests but also social interactions with peers); work-life oriented students, motivated by career goals but uninterested in the social dimension of the university experience; and a final group of non-committed students, whose academic/career goals and social aspirations remain unclear and ill-defined. Perhaps a little bleakly, Mann (2001:7) suggests that many students fall within this third category, though he identifies two orientations within this grouping – a surface orientation for learners whose sole concern is task completion to minimum requirements, and a strategic orientation for learners who are pre-occupied with fulfilling assessment requirements in the pursuit of higher grades. Kneale (1997) uses the term strategic for both categories. Both orientations arguably share a degree of alienation from the subject and process of study and being a student. In relation to

categories of de-motivation, Round (2005) similarly uses a two-fold categorisation, identifying alongside a strategic group a group she describes as ‘reactive’ entrants, motivated solely by extrinsic pressures from family, peers, teachers and a perception that enrolling at university is just a natural next step in their lives; as Mann (2001:9) puts it – “most students nowadays go to university... because they experience no real choice in the matter.” Phinney, Dennis and Osorio (2006) use the term ‘default motivation’ to encapsulate this motivational drive, which may not necessarily carry a negative inflection. Budd (2014:254), for example, discusses how this view of university entry as a form of natural progression may relate to the ways in which young people construct ‘logics of appropriateness’ in that “if one is bright, the appropriate route is a university degree.”

### ***Students’ motivation in HE***

Having identified a number of different ways of understanding motivation, let us now turn to an examination of studies that have set out to analyse and describe student motivation in HE. An assessment of the reading reveals something of a dichotomous picture - on the one hand, students are constructed as motivated ‘consumer-investors’ (Shahjahan et al, 2014; Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003:599) “taking responsibility for their own learning as independent, autonomous and self-directed individuals.” On the other hand, (see Kneale and others below) this consumerist construction sometimes has more negative hues, as students are seen as instrumentally motivated to achieve the credentials of university study, but somewhat passive and disengaged when it comes to more intrinsic motives in relation to study enjoyment, personal development and social interaction. Unsurprisingly, there are critiques of such representations. Leathwood and O’Connell (2003:611) and Bowl, Cooke & Hockings (2008), for example, argue that social disadvantage may push some students towards such orientations in a focussed and more urgent attempt to gain future security. O’Toole and Prince (2015) also challenge this passive consumer construction, arguing that

students have more complex social conceptions of their roles, motives and involvements at university. Similarly, Tight (2013) argues that customer/consumer student constructions fail to adequately capture the subtle complexities of modern-day student realities.

In Leathwood & O'Connell's study (2003), 50% of students agreed that earning money was indeed a major motive for them, though a higher 67% suggested that their choice was in fact based on subject interest. In a similar study by Winn in 2002, however, only 15% of participants indicated that subject interest was their main reason for studying. In Loeber and Higson's (2009) study of UK and German students, however, it was found that intrinsic factors were the main entry motives for students in both national settings, though Kennett, Reed & Lam (2011) suggested intrinsic motives were more pronounced among higher year undergraduates, first year students endorsing more extrinsic motives for entry.

Returning to Winn's study (2002), students were grouped into a tri-partite motivational typology: an intrinsically motivated group of engaged students with significant family and professional responsibilities; a group of less engaged students with similar responsibilities who focussed their efforts more strategically on completing course requirements; and a third group of often younger, less motivated students with few outside responsibilities. Winn expresses some disquiet about this group:

These interviewees had an instrumental approach to their studies, aiming to do the minimum of academic work required. The experiences of these students raise issues about the nature of student motivation. These students are motivated to pass their assessments and attain a degree; indeed, one student says she is motivated to achieve a first. If, as is the case in much recent higher education policy, economic outcomes in terms of a degree which will lead to employment are prioritised over the process of

learning and intellectual development, then these students may be considered to be motivated. (Winn 2002:453)

Kneale (1997) similarly identified a group of students whom he considers at variance with a university culture that assumes students wish to be there, while Higgins *et al* (2002:59) express related concerns about strategic students who “conceive assessment tasks as obstacles to overcome in the pursuit of grades.” In a similar vein, Berrett (2015) reports on survey evidence which supports what is described as a shift from largely intrinsic motivations for university entry towards more instrumentally inflected orientations. Round’s (2005) study offers some interesting data in this regard. As many as 85.9% of respondents expressed improved job prospects as their main reason for entering HE (cf. 92% in a study carried out by Higgins *et al*, 2002:53); only 53.8% suggested it was down to subject interest (cf. 71% in Higgins *et al*, 2002), and even fewer (37.5%) because of a general enjoyment of study. 25% reported family pressure as a main reason for enrolment, and Round notes that these students “showed the problematic characteristics of reactive entrants” (p.14) elsewhere in their responses. As many as 45% revealed a strategic attitude in admitting that they did the minimum amount of work required (p.13). Round states that the majority of students in the study agreed with the statement “I find the course boring but will stick with it because of getting a job”.

Clearly, many of the above studies are concerned with assessing what Round terms daily motivation. Given this study’s focus on entry motives, Neill (2004) provides a useful conceptual framework for examining relevant motivational elements. Though not used as a basis for any published work himself, his framework unites a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic components. These involve intrinsic factors, “defined as the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than some separable consequence” (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 56), and extrinsic motives, driven by instrumental values. Specifically, this involves a focus on 2

intrinsic motives (self-exploration and altruism) and 4 extrinsic dimensions (default motivation, social enjoyment, social pressures, and career and qualifications). This last dimension will not be discussed in this paper, given the focus on non-economic motives (see author, forthcoming, for a discussion). ‘Social enjoyment’ is classified as an extrinsic factor, given its orientation towards externally located goals, though a degree of ‘classificatory ambiguity’ should be acknowledged. An examination of the strength and balance of these various motives in the different national settings will now be offered, following an overview of the study’s design.

## **Research design**

A number of decisions determined the selection of the countries included in the study. All 3 are EU member states, subject to the same HE goals as dictated by EU agreements on the one hand, but shaped by different national traditions and histories on the other. The 3 sites also offer a set of contrasting economic backdrops (Douglass, 2010, World Bank, 2015) and operate distinct policies with regard to degree funding – studying in the majority of the German states is still free; in Portugal, annual tuition fees apply of between EUR 999-1037, whereas English fees are set at around £9,000 per year (Eurydice, 2015).

It was decided to focus on undergraduates at one institution in each of the countries, and as such, the findings are not necessarily representative of the national picture (inasmuch as that exists). To provide a degree of relatability (Hammerlsey, 1990), however, the universities involved were purposively selected on the basis of their *relative* typicality – large, multi-faculty and state-run institutions offering a wide range of courses at BA/MA/D levels in the West Midlands, North-Rhine Westphalia and the Algarve, recruiting students from a wide range of backgrounds. The students surveyed were all studying broadly similar subjects – this in an attempt to provide as valid a basis for comparison as possible, given the potential



dissimilarity in motivations between students from different disciplines. My own location in Educational Studies led me thus to target students on a range of education and teaching-related degrees. A mixed-methods survey approach was adopted, consisting of an on-line questionnaire, followed by individual email interviews with students from each institution. The participants were contacted and recruited via each institution's virtual learning environment. At this stage, students were also asked to declare their willingness to take part in subsequent email interviews.

The questionnaire aimed to capture a picture of students' motives by using a version of Neill's (2004) motivation survey. It consisted of a total of 35 questions, 7 of which collected categorical details. The remaining Likert-scale items required respondents to express levels of agreement (1-5) with statements based around the motivational components mentioned previously. The intention was to provide an initial numerical indication of key areas of agreement, in an attempt to highlight broader commonalities and differences regarding the relative importance of these motivational elements. It should be noted that the percentage figures used below are included here for the purposes of tentative indication, rather than statistical statement of fact – the limitations imposed by the self-selective nature of the samples, the variation in group sizes, and the single institutional and subject-area composition can only support fallibilistic interpretation (Schwandt, 2001:91) rather than scientific measurement.

After piloting and adjustments, all respondents completed an English-language version of the questionnaire, and as such, an attempt was made to formulate the statements in 'plain English.' Though an initial consideration was to opt for German and Portuguese translations, discussions with colleagues persuaded me that an English-language version should pose few problems, given that students in both countries have studied English as a compulsory pre-university subject, and that completing the survey involved only receptive language skills.

In total, 351 students completed the survey – 150 UK students (42.7% of the overall sample, and thus the largest grouping; 99 Germans (28.2%) and 102 Portuguese (29%). Of these, 17.2% were male, 82.8% female, representing thus a marked gender imbalance, though reflective of course recruitment patterns at all 3 institutions. As regards age, 76% of the overall sample were 18-25, 17% were 26-40, 6.8% were over 41. There were more variations in age between the 3 settings, particularly with regard to the number of mature students included – in the UK sample, 18% of students were 26-40 (11.7% in Portugal and 21% in Germany); students over 41 represented 14% of the UK sample, 4% of the Portuguese but none in Germany. Students were additionally asked to state their ethnicity, though many chose not to, and as such a reliable breakdown of the sample's ethnic composition cannot be presented. All the participants had studied between 2 and 7 semesters at university.

The results of the survey were used as a basis for developing the second stage of the research. A set of 7 open-ended interview questions were emailed to all the students who had expressed a willingness to participate in this stage, the intention being to generate more exploratory qualitative data to complement the numerical detail from stage one. Though email interviews have certain advantages - cost and time efficiency, access and reach (Meho, 2006) - some limitations unfortunately became equally evident, most notably lower response rates. This might be ascribed to the lack of rapport afforded by anonymous electronic approaches, and potentially also to perceptions of greater effort requirements, especially on the part of the German and Portuguese students, who were being asked questions in a second language. As such, a set of responses was received from 26 students (13 English – 11 female, 2 male; 7 Germans – 5 female, 2 male; 6 Portuguese – 5 female). Their comments (included here verbatim and uncorrected) were analysed and coded using the motivational categories described above, though further codes were applied as new themes and nuances were identified. Though the numbers of returns were somewhat disappointing, this second stage

was still successful in both corroborating stage 1 findings and in providing a greater depth of qualitative detail.

### **Student entry motives in the 3 countries**

The online software package used for the questionnaire enabled filtering by origin and converted responses into percentage totals (rounded here to one decimal place) to facilitate comparison. The differences in country sample sizes mentioned above should of course be noted. Responses to items belonging to the same motivational categories were then brought together to allow a comparison of patterns, consistencies and emphases across the data.

#### ***Extrinsic factors – default motivation, social pressures and social enjoyment***

(insert table 1 here)

Table 1: non-economic motives – agreement percentages for extrinsic factors

<b>EXTRINSIC FACTORS</b>			
<b>Default motivation</b>	<b>Germans</b>	<b>Portuguese</b>	<b>English</b>
I didn't know what else to do	12.4	6.9	0
it's better than working	18.7	18.5	6.3
it gives me something to do	38.6	41.3	20.5
I don't have any better options	15.6	6.9	10.3
Mean percentage agreement:	21.3	18.4	9.3
<b>Social pressures</b>	<b>Germans</b>	<b>Portuguese</b>	<b>English</b>
others expect me to get a degree	24.9	21.4	19.1
others have told me I should	24.9	24.2	19.1
it would disappoint other people if I didn't	22.5	21.3	15.1
social expectations from those around me.	16.1	33.2	22.8
Mean percentage agreement:	22.1	25	19
<b>Social enjoyment</b>	<b>Germans</b>	<b>Portuguese</b>	<b>English</b>
it's a fun place to be	49.8	20.6	41.6
I enjoy the social life	83.8	37.9	37.4
I enjoy the social environment	65.5	30.9	49.4
it's a great place to develop friendships	59.3	51.6	62.4
Mean percentage agreement:	63.3	35.2	47.7

As Table 1 illustrates, the statements relating to default motivation showed a fairly similar and consistent picture across all 3 settings. Relatively few students in each country suggested they had attended university because of a lack of other options, the majority expressing stronger *disagreement* with these items (e.g. responses to ‘I didn’t know what else to do’ – 78.2% German, 79.3% Portuguese, 94.6% English). Data from stage 2 corroborate these findings, which are at odds with Mann (2001), discussed earlier. When asked what they would have done, had they not opted for university, responses revealed a range of considered alternatives that were common across the settings, from particular career options (hospitality, office work) to a number of training courses and apprenticeships. There were only 2 respondents (both German) who admitted to having no idea:

“University was the only possibility I was really aware of. I have no idea what else I would have chosen.”

Despite these broad similarities, there are some minor differences in emphasis between the 3 groups, most notably that default motivation is slightly higher overall among the German students, and lowest among the English sample. The interview data again offered some support for these figures, with 3 German students declaring elements of default motivation among their main reasons for attending university (cf. Budd, 2014):

“I had the idea from school this was the only way to proceed. Also studying does postpone the question of what kind of job I want to do and gives me more time to figure out what to do in life.” (German female)

None of the Portuguese sample echoed such sentiments in their interviews, though 2 of the English students, both female, commented on “it feeling like a natural progression to go” and that “it had always been instilled into me via secondary school that university was the next and only step,” again echoing Budd (2014).

A re-examination of stage 1 data by year of study revealed some interesting differences, however. Mean percentage agreement figures across the 4 items were only very slightly higher for first year German and Portuguese students, but much higher for the English first years (23% cf. 9.3% overall), while higher year students (6-7 semesters of study) from all 3 countries reported lower mean agreement (Germans 14.3, Portuguese 0, English 10.6). Interpreting these perhaps minor differences naturally requires care, though there may be some support here for Kennet, Read and Lam's (2011) assertion that higher year students endorse more intrinsic factors. The lower overall agreement from the English students in this category might seem at first sight to suggest that the introduction of high-cost fees in England makes these UK students less inclined to enrol at university as a default option (despite some awareness of a school system strongly geared towards promoting university enrolment, as revealed by the comments). But the higher and more similar first year percentages across all 3 samples question this interpretation, especially considering that the UK first years included in the study were from the first national intake subjected to the higher fee regime.

Moving on to an examination of the influence of social pressures on motives to attend university, responses appeared more similar across all 3 settings. In line with the 25% of students in Round's study (2005), around a quarter of each sample agreed that such factors had been influential, though relatively few suggested this was a major influence on their decision-making. Only 3.2% of the Germans *strongly* agreed, for example, that social expectations were behind their decision to study, compared to 7.4% of the Portuguese and 4.1% of the English. Far more (and fairly similar numbers) are inclined to disagree that awareness of such expectations was a key factor behind their entry motivation – 64.5% of Germans disagreed that it would have disappointed other people if they hadn't gone to university, compared to 60.6% of the Portuguese sample and 71.6% of the English. As with default motivation, there were once again some age/study-year related differences, with first

year students across all 3 national groups expressing higher agreement (25-29%) and higher years much lower (0-12%).

In the stage 2 data, however, none of the participants mentioned any form of social pressure as a reason for going to university, in fact several from each country explicitly referred to such factors as being of no influence on their motivation whatsoever:

“I wasn’t going to the university to please my family or friends because university is no joke one must be ready to invest time, resources, etc. and if the only reason you are doing it is to impress, it will get easily boring and you may lose your mind.” (German male)

Though such comments were shared across participants from all 3 settings, it is interesting to note the remarks of one mature English student (44) who reveals a different perception:

“I feel personally don’t study because it’s expected of you, I feel many students come to uni because it’s the pressure from school or parents. For me it has been a personal journey but I have seen and heard many younger students discussing how they don’t feel they want to be there, parents have funded and expect them to achieve.”

The findings here offer little support for this view, though it may be the case that some students find it difficult to admit to such influence in the interests of (self-) impression management, or that the self-selective nature of the sample has resulted in the exclusion of students for whom such pressures have been more pronounced.

However, with regard to being motivated by the social enjoyment that university is perceived to offer, stronger differences emerge between the groups. This time, the German students appear more strongly motivated by social factors of this kind, the Portuguese the least. As table 1 shows, almost twice as many Germans as Portuguese agreed they were

drawn by the social dimension in their responses to 3 of the 4 questionnaire items, the English students occupying a middle position in this particular hierarchy. This hierarchy remains intact when examining the 1<sup>st</sup> and higher year agreement figures, though these again reflect the same differences as above – higher agreement from the first years, lower from the older students. What is striking, however, is that among the higher year students, still over half (52.8%) of the German sample agreed, cf. 18.6 of the English/4.1% Portuguese. Stage 2 data resonate strongly with these numerical impressions. Though some German students were dismissive of this in their comments, others saw this differently, and German students were the only ones in the sample to list the social dimension as a prime motive:

“I came to university to make friends. This may seem unimportant, but it is actually very important because networking is key in today’s world. It is not always about what you know, but who you know.” (German male)

Without exception, the English and Portuguese students belittled the significance of this kind of social motivation, though several acknowledged that they enjoyed the friendships that developed ‘as a bonus’. Overall, however, the following sentiments are representative of those made in this regard by the English and Portuguese respondents:

“This reason is very talked here in Portugal, and people continue to say that university students are always partying, having fun and have the better life, however I am personally not a very partying girl so it’s not that important.”

### ***Intrinsic motives - Self-exploration and altruism***

Insert table 2 here

Table 2: non-economic motivations – agreement percentages for intrinsic factors

<b>INTRINSIC FACTORS</b>			
<b>Personal development</b>	<b>Germans</b>	<b>Portuguese</b>	<b>English</b>
I want to explore new ideas	78.1	93	91.4
I want to challenge myself	65.6	86.1	87.4
for my personal growth and development	96.8	100	97.8
I love learning	45	64.2	66.6
Mean percentage agreement	71.3	86	85.8
<b>Altruism</b>	<b>Germans</b>	<b>Portuguese</b>	<b>English</b>
I genuinely want to help others	59.3	71.3	89.5
I want to contribute to society	48.3	81.4	79.1
I want to help solve society's problems	25.7	75.7	39.5
I want to be more useful to society	32.1	89.2	79.1
Mean percentage agreement	41.3	79.4	71.8

Table 2 reveals broad overall commonalities across the sample groups, with the vast majority of students expressing agreement that their decisions to study were based on relatively strong intrinsic desires (cf. Loeber and Higson, 2009) for personal growth and development (not a single student disagreed, for example, with the item that explicitly included these 2 elements). A comparison between first and higher years revealed much higher agreement among the older year students (close to 100% across all 3 groups), contrasting with lower levels among the first years (again supporting Kennet, Read and Lam, 2011). Interview data reflected a similar picture, with students from each country volunteering aspects of self-exploration (framed around desires for knowledge acquisition and self-improvement) as reasons for attending university, and none of them included this dimension among their least important reasons. The following comments relating to the first idea were replicated across the data:

“I wanted to gain a deeper knowledge of my subjects, out of a desire for more knowledge and my interest.” (German female)

“One of my reasons is based on my curiosity and constant search for knowledge.”  
(Portuguese female)



With regard to the second element, many students stressed the idea of proving and improving themselves in different ways:

“The main reason was for me to do something for myself, to prove to everyone around me I was capable of doing it. I wanted to do something that would let me live my life how I wanted, I guess it was partly about gaining the independence I didn’t have so much in secondary and 6th form.” (English female)

“For me, it is to be someone in the life, to have more culture and to be able to think about peoples behaviour.” (Portuguese male)

Such findings may of course be a function of the dispositions of students drawn to study education courses at this level. Again, however, as table 2 reveals, the German students expressed slightly lower levels of agreement with all 4 items when compared to the Portuguese and English students; they also expressed higher ambivalence and disagreement, most notably in relation to items 19 (“because I want to challenge myself” – 15.6% of Germans disagreed, cf. 6.8% Portuguese, 4.1% English) and 29 (“because I love learning” – 19.3% of Germans disagreed, cf. 10.7% Portuguese and 10.4% English). Caution must again be exercised when interpreting these relatively minor differences, and the lower German responses concerning this last item in particular might potentially reflect slightly more negative evaluations of learning at their institution, rather than of learning per se.

With regard to altruistic motivation, i.e. being motivated by intrinsic desires to contribute to society, the above hierarchy of responses was again reversed, as more pronounced differences emerged. The Portuguese students appear more strongly motivated by desires in this domain than the German students, as the agreement percentages in table 2 indicate. The German students express a greater degree of ambivalence here and consistently offer the lowest agreement ratings, while the English students appear more closely aligned with the

Portuguese students. Interestingly this time, percentages for both first and higher years remain very close to the group averages across all 3 groups, reflecting thus no major differences between novice and more experienced students. As with the previous categories, stage 2 data offer much support. In fact, none of the German students volunteers any altruistic motives in their comments, and only 1 English student refers to her motivation being based on a desire “to create a better life for my daughter and to inspire her.” Though the Portuguese interview sample was small, comments suggestive of altruistic motivation are particularly striking in the data. One student comments:

“Improving society is for me a big desire. Because of the course I’m taking, it has inspired me a lot and made me see things with another eyes. Made me see all of us as single persons, with our own lives, but at the same time dependent on others, on the society.” (Portuguese male)

While another reflects:

“I would like to say that being a student it’s a very rewarding place to be, especially in my field of studies, because I will be able to help people in the future, and that’s why I’m here.”

Differences here are perhaps a little more surprising than in some other categories, given that the entire sample was made up of students on education and teaching-related courses, who might arguably be inclined to see such programmes as being about ‘making a difference’ given their strong societal focus. Interpreting the larger differences that have emerged here is thus something of a challenge. It could be that harsher personal experiences of economic austerity in the Portuguese context have perhaps strengthened students’ motives to ‘make a difference’ and sharpened their sense of need to contribute to wider social improvement, whereas a more economically buoyant situation in Germany has perhaps enabled/sustained a

view of university study as a period of social enjoyment. The slightly higher German default motivation and lower self-exploration ratings perhaps support this analysis, though it is of course difficult to offer a definitive interpretation.

### **Discussion and conclusions - Similarities and Differences**

At this juncture, it is worth considering what the findings reveal with regard to similarities and differences between these groups of students. Caution must naturally be exercised in these considerations, given the potential influence of a wide range of contextual idiosyncrasies that may be implicated in the findings in complex ways that are not transparent here. Though the sample consisted of students from the same subject area, there are inevitable differences in relation to institutional orientation and mission, length of degree programmes, educational approaches, methods and delivery, routes into HE from secondary, the broader student populations in each setting, etc.

Concerning similarities relating to these students' entry motives, several conclusions are worth noting. Firstly, default motivation appears fairly low across all 3 groupings (though slightly higher among the Germans, as noted). Secondly, and echoing Round (2005) almost a quarter of students in each sub-set agreed that their decisions were driven by perceived social pressures and expectations. Though this is far from a majority, it is suggestive of a potentially sizeable number of students. Given the concerns associated with 'reactive entrants' identified in the literature, it would seem pertinent for institutions to reflect on how they support and engage students whose primary reasons for enrolment might be externally pressured. Thirdly, all 3 groups report strong desires to pursue their self-development, though these desires appear slightly stronger among the English and Portuguese students, as demonstrated. The exact nature of any (causal) relationship between somewhat stronger personal development motives in England and Portugal and the existence of tuition fees in

both these countries is of course difficult to establish on the basis of evidence here, though the question arises as to what extent fees perhaps intensify such intrinsic desires, rather than dilute them and amplify extrinsic motives. This issue would clearly be worthy of further research attention. A final similarity relates to year-of-study and supports Kennet, Reed and Lam's (2011) research, with higher-year students reporting lower agreement for the 3 extrinsic factors included, and higher agreement for the intrinsic component of personal development.

With regard to differences, two conclusions arise. Firstly, the social promise of university appears of stronger appeal for these German students, particularly in comparison to the Portuguese sample; conversely, these Portuguese (and English) students would seem to be more motivated by altruistic desires to contribute to social improvement than the Germans, and intriguingly, this is the only category where age/study-year appears unimportant. As discussed, the extent to which economic context is significant is a question that would be useful to explore in more detail in future studies, and also to survey students across a range of subjects (and other countries) to determine to what extent the above patterns are consistent across other academic disciplines and nations. And in relation to Round's (2005) motivational typology, it would be useful to examine to what extent the patterns of entry motivation identified here relate to students' daily motivation, i.e. their study engagement.

As for what the study finally reveals with regard to the balance of non-economic extrinsic and intrinsic motives under scrutiny here, it should be remembered that the findings offer a snapshot of a motivational amalgam derived from a diverse collection of potentially shifting individual configurations. A tentative reading of the data indicates that intrinsic motives attract higher agreement from all 3 groupings, notwithstanding the differences in emphasis mentioned, and the German students' responses to the altruistic component. As also noted, this appears particularly true of higher year students, who consistently report lower

agreement for extrinsic factors. This again may reflect the more similar dispositions of students drawn to the undergraduate study of education. All the same, the fact that this broad commonality is evident across all 3 sub-samples should be noted, so should the fact that it holds out despite the manifold national, local and contextual differences described; as Bartram (2010:187) suggests, “evidence of particular phenomena across a range of contexts arguably allows more weight to be attached to certain conclusions given the replication of findings across datasets.” With this in mind, (re-) considering ways in which universities might enhance their effectiveness in transparently signposting and profiling student opportunities for personal development and social contribution emerges as a worthwhile endeavour.

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